

## **The evolution of commercial whale watching - action plan for 2005**

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British Columbia and Washington inland waters are a holiday destination for hundreds of thousands of annual visitors: Many with the anticipation of observing wild killer whales (*Orcinus orca*) in their natural habitat. This has fuelled the development and evolution of the commercial whale watching industry. Advancements include increased rigor of voluntary guidelines that now include spatial, behavioural and species-specific operating procedures. Special exclusionary zones such as Limekiln State Park, WA, and Pender Island, BC, now exist to provide no-boat zones for whales. Operator concerns stimulated these revisions with efforts culminating in the “Look Before You Book” campaign to promote responsible whale watching. On-board natural history interpretation has evolved from basic biology to population and ecosystem level conservation discussions. Repeat passengers remark on “take home” impact of their whale watch experience that often relates to more informed consumer choices regarding marine parks, commercial fisheries and pollution. Past actions include 13,500 petition signatures collected opposing the resumption of whaling for grey whales (*Eschrichtius robustus*). Whale watch vessels are an ideal educational platform and the 2005 conservation action goal is to heighten the education value through a “Killer Whales Need Your Help” program focusing on salmon and household choices.